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Testimony presented before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs  
on S. 868, a bill to amend the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw  
Restoration Amendments Act of 2003  
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I would like to thank the Chairman and the Committee, particularly Senator Smith, for inviting me to testify before you today regarding legislation to provide the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw with a Tribal Forest.

I am the Natural Resources Manager for the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, and I am a Grand Ronde tribal member. Our tribal members are the descendants of 5 tribes and more than 20 bands of Indian people including the Nehalem, Tillamook, Nestuca, Salmon River, Rogue River, Molalla, Kalapuya, Umpqua, and Chasta. I am also a veteran staffer of the U.S. Senate, having worked on American Indian issues, chemical weapons demilitarization, and social security reform.

Like the Coos, my Tribes went through a long legislative process to have land restored to us for cultural, ecological and economic uses. I hope that the experience the Grand Ronde went through, and the quality of our land management since then, will be relevant to policy-makers in the current proposal. More importantly, I want to dispel the myths and misconceptions about Tribal forest management that a few continue to harbor.

Like the Coos, Congress terminated the U.S. government's relationship with the Grand Ronde Tribes in 1954, and what was left of the original 69,000 acre Reservation was gone entirely. The Grand Ronde Tribes were stripped of their Reservation lands, but not of their spirit. In 1983, our status as a tribe was restored by the government. This opened the door for regaining a portion of the

land that had been taken from us. In 1988, with the support of United States Senator Mark O. Hatfield and this Committee, the Tribes were provided 9,811 acres of our original Reservation. In 1994, an additional 241 acres were added to the Reservation.

It is meaningful in the context of this hearing to point out that in the 15 years since our forest was restored to us, the Grand Ronde have exceeded the expectations of environmentalists, local communities, and the forest products industry.

While lawsuits and procedural paralysis have crippled neighboring federal lands, the Grand Ronde has been able to meet the promise of President Clinton's Northwest Forest Plan – to protect the environment and to produce a sustainable level of timber harvest.

Timber harvested from our Reservation feeds local mills, which in turn creates jobs and supports local economies. Because of this, the Tribes play an important role in the lives of tribal and community members. And while the Grand Ronde has reason to be proud of our timber harvest and the manner in which we extract timber resources, we are equally proud of the manner in which we protect and enhance our non-timber assets.

In just the last decade, the Tribes have completed numerous stream enhancement projects – projects that have created high quality habitats and opened up over 20 miles of spawning and rearing reaches of Reservation streams. In 1995, we began seeing Coho salmon returning to the Reservation. Tribal forest stewardship has been so effective that we have entered into an MOU with the Forest Service and BLM to help manage 10,000 acres of *their* land to help find creative ways of carrying out the Northwest Forest Plan.

The Grand Ronde has only been able to achieve this level of success because we have flexibility that the Forest Service and BLM do not. Like the proposal for

the Coos Tribal Forest, the Grand Ronde Tribal Forest is managed under the National Indian Forest Resources Management Act, in cooperation with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Contrary to claims that the BIA commits “egregious malfeasance” in its timber management, the Grand Ronde has maintained a successful partnership with the BIA and I would discourage any categorical depictions of Indian forest management – especially in light of the previous hearing on IFMAT II.

Fortunately, the Grand Ronde is not saddled with managing our forest under the Northwest Forest Plan, yet our forest is healthy, and provides a wide range of habitats. Because of all of the litigation associated with the Northwest Forest Plan, it has proven to be a dismal failure, and has had detrimental affects on the overall health of western forests – including the landscape level loss of spotted owl habitat to catastrophic wildfire. Consider too, that catastrophic fires also alarmingly degrade fisheries habitats. And while the lands at issue before you lie in the coast range where fire incidents are less frequent, we know that western forests do in fact burn, and that lack of sound management increases the likelihood that they will. Because of our successes in managing our forest lands, I posit that Tribal forest management is more responsive to the needs of the land.

Returning land to Indian Tribes, whether small in acres or large, is truly a matter between the federal government and the tribes with which they are working – a government-to-government process. We are all aware that there are concerns on all sides whenever federal lands are at issue, but this particular process must strive to steer clear of being driven by popularity.

Opponents of the bill before the Committee may assert that their claim to the lands supersedes the claim of Indian people, and this creates a dilemma for our elected leaders.

Opponents may also present arguments against the transfer of lands to the tribes, and explain how devastating the transfer would be to the environment,

particularly to the spotted owl and anadromous fish. But this claim ignores the success of the Grand Ronde that has faced the same management challenges, the same endangered species in the same geographic area. The Coos Forest Plan is based on restoring late successional habitat for the spotted owl, which is precisely what the environmental community has been advocating for the Siuslaw National Forest – yet many in their community still have strong objection to this legislation.

So what, I ask, is truly at the heart of their opposition to tribal control of ancestral lands? Perhaps they simply do not want to see timber harvested for any reason, for any people. Perhaps they would be satisfied to see the Coos, Lower Umpqua, Siuslaw remain landless, and without an economy. At the end of the day, I suggest that at least a portion of their opposition lies in “control.” If they cannot control the decisions that tribes make, then they oppose the plan. And no doubt, they will present a number of arguments, but I submit that their arguments are speculative and emotional in nature, aimed at raising fears, not grounded in fact. The Coos, Lower Umpqua, Siuslaw Tribes are the only federally recognized tribe in Oregon that do not have any land to call their own. It would be just to return to them a portion of their ancestral lands, and equally just in allowing them to write their own plan – a plan that would balance the needs of the tribes with the protection and enhancement of tribal forest assets.

Finally, if the restoration of Reservation lands fails to happen, then what is the alternative for the Coos, Lower Umpqua, Siuslaw people? I implore you not to ignore their right to have lands restored to them. Should you support the bill before you, your decision will not be popular among those opposed to it. However, supporting it is the only right course of action, and time will prove, as it has with the Grand Ronde, that it was the best decision. The Tribes’ needs will be satisfied, and the environment will be made more resilient, healthy, and well functioning.

My thanks to you again, for the privilege of speaking before you today.